

FOUR PLAYS

MORLEY ROBERTS

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FOUR PLAYS

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BY

MORLEY ROBERTS

LONDON

EVELEIGH NASH

1911

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THE
HOUR OF GREATNESS
A MYSTERY PLAY
IN ONE ACT

CHARACTERS

FEDERICO, *a Poet*

ETTORE, *a Painter*

GIULIO, *an Actor*

LUCIA, *a Model*

MEPHISTOPHELES

Scene : Pisa

Time : The Sixteenth Century

THE HOUR OF GREATNESS

The scene is the room of FEDERICO in an old palazzo of Pisa. There is a window at the back, through which are visible the Leaning Tower and part of the Duomo. The room is very bare, but there are old worn tapestries on the walls. A table occupies the middle of the room : on it lie papers and books. Two tall brass candlesticks stand on it. The candles are lighted. The time is the fall of evening. There are doors right and left. On the walls hang masks of Comedy and Tragedy. When the curtain rises FEDERICO is seated at the table. Happy singing is heard outside.

FEDERICO.

[Sitting with his hands under his chin and staring in front of him.] My hour!—when will it come? Life's a rising tragedy for all of us. The most roaring farce ends in death. *[Singing continues. Then there is laughter. FEDERICO starts up angrily.]* Oh, they can laugh, but I——*[He goes down to the mask of Comedy, stares at it, takes it from the wall and holds it in both hands.]* Here's life as they think of it! *[Turns it round.]* It's hollow, as a grave. Once there

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was in it the spirit of merriment, but now it grins and mocks at me. Since I knew ambition I've had no laughter in me! There's a devil in ambition. I have visions while here, in this decayed palace of faded Pisa, I eat my heart out. [*Laughter again outside.*] That's the laughter of the gods! And yet I've power in me, power that none recognises while the golden years dance by and then grow lame and grey. And still there's power within me! Oh, I do declare it, though my friends may mock me when I say so. How will my greatness come, when the world *shall* kneel before me? [*He picks up MS. and strikes it.*] These are golden words, words that shine, words that dance and sing, words that are tears, words that march in conquering, glittering ranks like an army. Oh, every word's a warrior with a spear, each heroic, each divine: each lord of an empire! Together they're like stars in our sky of Italy! [*Satiric laughter heard outside. FEDERICO starts and puts the MS. down. He sits at the table.*] 'Tis as if Ettore out there mocked at me, as if Giulio jeered! And they are—less than nothing! They dream of dancing and wine! For love, the kiss of any girl will serve, for they've no visions, no gods, no great desires! And they've no devils. Would that I were such as Faustus, that I believed as he did. I'd sell my soul, my life, my eager life, for the one big hour that should be mine!

[*Singing is again heard outside and the sound of footsteps.*]

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ETTORE.

[*Outside, calling.*] Federico, Federico!

[*Knock at the door. FEDERICO rises and unlocks it. The Painter enters dressed as a Pierrot. He comes in laughing.*

FEDERICO.

What now, Ettore?

ETTORE.

Come with us, Federico: come, my owl of song; my poetic raven, my subfusk poet! Put off your nightlike plumes and dance and sing with us, to say nothing of drinking.

FEDERICO.

I will not—Is it a feast day, Ettore?

ETTORE.

Why, my lad of poesy, every day's a feast day, even when it's a fast. For fasts end and appetite waits on them, when the cheapest wine, such as painters and poets may drink, is better than all the Frenchmen grow and a crust beats fat beccaficos! Come with us.

FEDERICO.

I cannot. Who goes with you?

ETTORE.

Love and Comedy! In other words—Giulio and Lucia, the little girl who loves you. She's coming to

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ask you to put on a white jacket and a red sash and dance with her.

FEDERICO.

I will not dance.

ETTORE.

[*With his hand on FEDERICO's shoulder.*] Oh, does your heart now-a-days never put on gold and dance in the sun? Why Life's as sweet as the grapes of Tuscany and the sun is our musician sitting aloft in a gilded gallery; to its playing the wild winds dance, Federico! Is your soul parchment, are you bound in leather, bathed in ink? Is a pen your sceptre? You'd be a king of poets, but surely you're no poet!

FEDERICO.

So much those admit who leave me inglorious.

ETTORE.

[*Sitting on the table and swinging his legs.*] My notion of a poet is born of watching the little birds, Federico. I would see you swing on a bending bough in the light of the sun! I'd have you shout with a chanting thrush, or lie fluting in green grass against a nightingale that courts love in the moonlight.

FEDERICO.

[*Rising and putting his hand on ETTORE's shoulder.*] Why, you're a poet too. But there are many birds

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of song, Ettore. My heart's nigh broken of waiting.
I ask more than you or Lucia can offer me.

ETTORE.

Gods, see what we offer! A dance and a kiss,
a flask of Chianti and a cake; the sound of merriest
songs and a viol played by a cheerful blind man whose
heart dances! A lame man would leap to such a
festival. Come with us!

FEDERICO.

This is merest poverty. It's no triumph such as I
dream of!

ETTORE.

Does noble blood run in your veins and do your
noble legs refuse to caper in the moonlight save to
great music and in the company of dames and maidens
of high degree?

FEDERICO.

Oh, you speak folly. And yet—that's true! I live
not with my equals.

ETTORE.

Who are they?

FEDERICO.

The great ones of the earth,

ETTORE.

The elect of Pisa and the Pope and Emperor!
Then you are great?

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FEDERICO.

I know it.

ETTORE.

Some think so, I believe. I've heard an odd man or so say you were someone.

FEDERICO.

I'd give a year of my life to hear *some* say that.

ETTORE.

A year, a year! Why, Federico, in a year I shall eat three times three hundred and sixty-five meals and drink at least twice as many cups of wine and, I fervently hope, kiss on the very smallest reckoning fifty-two pretty girls. For one a week is a modest allowance and I'd be loath to stint myself. Would you give up so much to hear an empty word?

FEDERICO.

'Tis what I live for!

ETTORE.

Poor Lucia! And poor Federico!

FEDERICO.

'Tis what I'd—die for. That's ambition!

ETTORE.

To be for one moment, Federico, in the hot mouths of men; to melt; and be no more! 'Twere a wasted

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year, by all Pisa! I'd scarce miss one magic day for the Pope of Rome; not to have my pictures hung in the galleries of the Vatican, all on golden nails; not to have a Madonna prayed to above the high altar of St. Peter's!

FEDERICO.

For the like of that I'd sacrifice a thousand. Would that I knew the magic which would work it. There *is* a magic; that I know.

ETTORE.

There's wild magic in the vine.

FEDERICO.

There's more in laurel.

ETTORE.

Poison, they say. There's magic in the sunlight.

FEDERICO.

Man, you're but a lizard, a basking lizard on a wall.

ETTORE.

In a woman's eyes and on her lips——

FEDERICO.

I remember many and have sung them. The world for me!

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ETTORE.

You're mad. Will it ease your frenzy if I bow down to you?

FEDERICO.

You mock me, but in every artist's life there comes an hour when these thoughts must burn!

ETTORE.

May they burn out ere I singe my moist soul at them! [*There is sweet singing outside.*] Listen! That's better than such thoughts.

FEDERICO.

Who sings?

ETTORE.

One very poor mummer, with a heart of gold.

FEDERICO.

Giulio? Aye, he's kind, but he's an indifferent actor, Ettore.

ETTORE.

Off the stage he's as merry as a cricket. To-night he's playing the Devil!

FEDERICO.

With his part?

ETTORE.

He has borrowed for our dance a costume of Mephistopheles. Hark, he sings like an angel!

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FEDERICO.

Poor Giulio!

[*The singing comes nearer and GIULIO enters dressed as MEPHISTOPHELES.*]

GIULIO.

Are you coming, Federico?

FEDERICO.

No.

ETTORE.

You'll not persuade him, Giulio. He's lonesomely mad, giftedly crazy, divinely cracked. He leans towards death and destruction like our Tower.

GIULIO.

I care not. I'm mad too, but happily mad. A happy fool is a king to a sad philosopher, or I've no wisdom for anyone's service.

FEDERICO.

You a philosopher—well, I wish you were the devil himself, Giulio!

ETTORE.

'Tis a thing to say in the sunlight. In this dark place that's like a tomb——

GIULIO.

If I were what you wish what could I work for you, Federico?

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FEDERICO.

Give me my due!

ETTORE.

He means fame, Giulio, fame! It's more than love to him, better than Grignolino of the best, better than a risotto with cockscombs and saffron, better than red mullets done Livorno fashion.

GIULIO.

Every man to his table tastes. I'm your Mephistopheles, Federico! [*Striking an attitude, he wraps his red cloak round him.*] What is it you demand of me, mortal? Speak, speak!

ETTORE.

Aye, lad, play to him. Play to him, Federico. This is more cheerful mumming!

FEDERICO.

[*Smiling.*] Give me fame, brave spirit; put me in the mouths of men as a sweet morsel.

ETTORE.

Well said, Federico; you shall be a risotto with cockscombs!

GIULIO.

Mortal, you shall be famous. Your hour comes! I speak the truth bravely, for men shall talk of you over all the city.

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FEDERICO.

That's brave hearing! Will the great speak of me?

GIULIO.

As sure as I'm a promising actor I'll promise you that. The Duke himself shall respect you, and most like when he meets your funeral will doff his hat. The Duchess will be grieved: I've heard it stated that she loves poets; while their daughter——

FEDERICO.

Oh, she's beautiful indeed!

ETTORE.

No more than your last giglet, or Lucia, but while you are at your magic give him the Grand Duke's daughter, the fair Emilia.

GIULIO.

Good! 'Tis arranged. She shall cast an eye on him as he passes by——

FEDERICO.

Stranger events have happened! Queens have kissed poets ere now. I can think of that, and bring it near me! There are times I believe the great use of powerful thought is the true magic men have sought for.

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ETTORE.

Such things are not on my palette. What mean you?

FEDERICO.

That thinking *can* create, and does. My intensest thoughts are all on fame. I've seen strange things in dreams, things to be grasped——

ETTORE.

Girls to be kissed!

FEDERICO.

Oh, I made them, I—I!

GIULIO.

He believes in magic and witchcraft.

FEDERICO.

There's magic everywhere. All things are most miraculous. Man and woman, aye, the simplest thing that is! There are times when I believe my spirit has made the very world and all that's in it.

ETTORE.

Then I bless you! Take my thanks, uncle! No, you're my father and mother and have given me wine and kisses.

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GIULIO.

Why the devil did you not make me a great actor while you were about it? And yet—I know not. 'Tis better to be a poor merry devil like me, than like Salvatore who plays high tragedy and beats his woman. I'd not swap with any philosopher, and cry for wisdom.

FEDERICO.

Wisdom, what is it?

GIULIO.

Learned fool, 'tis in a cup or a platter, or a woman's heart—when she gives it away. It's happiness.

FEDERICO.

I'll find this happiness. For me it lies in fame. A man being set on anything can attain it.

ETTORE.

Be the Duke, my son.

FEDERICO.

There are greater powers than his. You do not know yet the powers of flesh and spirit. Is there not divination in the hand and fingers; augury in mere ashes and dropped sand, oracles in pyromantic flame? The ancients did divine by dots and dough, by words in books, by balanced sieves, by crystals,

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water, ink, a wand, a fountain, by finger-rings and by numbers. They could do amazingly. In men are gods and devils!

GIULIO.

I'm a devil, a merry devil.

FEDERICO.

At a price, they said of old, a man could summon them and make them slaves.

ETTORE.

At what price?

FEDERICO.

A man's soul, Ettore. That's their—fable.

[ETTORE *laughs* and GIULIO *crosses himself*.]

GIULIO.

I don't like to think about souls. It's unhealthy thinking. Thought ruins life, Federico. I have heard you say so.

FEDERICO.

I'd give mine——

ETTORE.

Why, he said he would give up years, live, bright, splendid years, to be famous, Giulio! Think of it, think of it!

GIULIO.

I've a great affection for myself as I am.

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FEDERICO.

You've no ambition. I'd give the world for my fulfilled desires.

GIULIO.

Come away and drink with us. I've five lire in my pouch and there's good drunkenness in that. Make Lucia laugh. There's much in others' happiness. I've learnt so much!

ETTORE.

Good Giulio!

FEDERICO.

Oh, wise fool! Would that I were one, too.

GIULIO.

Is it too late? If you've the native power in you to make the things you boast of, to call out your desires and feed them with your own heart, make yourself like us.

FEDERICO.

'Tis too late. Would that I had never sat up at nights, save to drink. There's hell in much learning, friends, and thought is the mother of despair. There's no such unhappy soul in Pisa as I.

ETTORE.

You make us so, too.

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FEDERICO.

But there's such power in man's mind. Dreams show it, and life itself, that many coloured miracle, that bubble, that wonder. I'll devote myself to powerful thoughts, for they are incantations. I've dreamed of the dead, the dear dead people. Have I not kissed dead lips and felt them warm? I've held them in these arms! They've spoken to me, though I've thought they somehow at times lacked power to be. Why was that? Was it a lack in me? Oh, there's such magic hidden in man and yet he goes as if he had it not. That's the wonder.

GIULIO.

This same thinking is a powerful disturber of the quiet spirit. It makes me shiver.

ETTORE.

[*To GIULIO.*] I'd not be Federico for all Pisa. I'd rather paint the picture of a king than be one.

GIULIO.

I'd rather act the Duke's fool than fool all the kings and dukes in Christendom and be like Lorenzo the Magnificent.

FEDERICO.

Thus it is that there are those who walk powerful with a terrible amulet about their necks, understanding it not. Go to your dancing. Get drunk and sing

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songs. I've a bigger kingdom in this room than any.
Some day you will bow down to me——

ETTORE.

When you are—dead !

GIULIO.

I'll bow at once. I'm a good devil and love Federico mightily, for I've a meek heart and love all men to be easy. If I were the actual powerful fiend himself I'd give him fame and the Duke's daughter and let him read his poems to the Pope and the Emperor.

FEDERICO.

You've a good heart, Giulio. I shall be great yet !

ETTORE.

Use these powers you speak of, Federico.

FEDERICO.

We make all powers, Ettore.

GIULIO.

These are thoughts that give me the ague.

ETTORE.

Might I, by imagination and irreligious thoughts, create a demon ?

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FEDERICO.

The books aver it. You can call him forth from the abyss.

ETTORE.

Where is the abyss?

FEDERICO.

In man's own soul. But there are many spirits in man, it may be. There's in me a spirit which is earthly who would live the earth's sweet life, as you do. That's my thought, but as to these powers the books affirm it, not doubtfully. I could persuade you.

GIULIO.

God forbid. Let me pray to be weak, and think of simple things. 'Tis a sweating thought to wake up and find his damnable Majesty by one's bed saying his prayers to one.

FEDERICO.

There are a thousand books that tell us of powers and divinations, of evil stars, of influences, of alien witchcrafts, of high sorcery, of incantations. They speak of spells which by rhymes and changed holy words, read backwards it may be, or with inverted sacraments and masses, call out of the abysm things which are mighty in their order.

GIULIO.

I'm sorry I'm a devil. [*Sings.*] I'd like to be an angel!

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FEDERICO.

To my notion these gifts are of the soul itself.
The mind's the creator. I've written a poem on these
things and shall indite an awful play thereon. We
can be what we would, if we but will it absolutely.

ETTORE.

I'll be no one and die happy.

GIULIO.

And I'll play the fool till some father of the
Church relieves me of my cap and bells and ushers me
into heaven where all poor honest fools are welcome.
Give up these dreams and come with us, Federico.
Such thoughts are like—passing bells.

FEDERICO.

I cannot !

ETTORE.

He's set on devil-making. Come, Giulio.

GIULIO.

Farewell, Federico. If you change your mind and
get a bright one, find us where we shall be. You'll
know the tavern by my singing, which is good
enough for catches, though not required at operas or
high funerals.

[*Exeunt* GIULIO AND ETTORE *singing*. FEDE-
RICO *walks up and down the room*.]

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FEDERICO.

Would I were what they are! The day's sufficient for them and the night is for sleep. But I've desires that choke me. My heart's full of indignation. 'Tis the indignation that one feels at death! Oh, Death's inexorable and takes our roses from us. [*Singing is heard outside in a minor key.*] That's Lucia! Poor child, she's sweet and loves me. I love her not. Once I loved a maiden—oh, she's dead! My desires are unearthly, for the stars! I'd love all the beauties of the world in one, with Annunziata's soul in her! My soul's the universe itself. Help me, great Powers! [*The singing comes nearer.*] There is no heavenly power! Or if there is he's in my heart and can be drawn by magic!

[*LUCIA enters. She is dressed in white with red roses in her hair. She comes to him meekly and takes his hand.*

LUCIA.

Are you coming, Federico!

FEDERICO.

I'm in no mood for folly, child.

LUCIA.

Is it foolish—to be happy, Federico?

FEDERICO.

Are you happy?

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LUCIA.

I could be.

FEDERICO.

Easily, child ?

LUCIA.

I cannot be happy by myself.

FEDERICO.

There are many to be happy with.

LUCIA.

I've been happy here.

FEDERICO.

I have not.

LUCIA.

Oh, Federico !

FEDERICO.

What is happiness ? Tell me, child.

LUCIA.

It's wanting nothing.

FEDERICO.

That's death ! I want all things.

LUCIA.

It's being loved and loving !

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FEDERICO.

And Death comes at last.

LUCIA.

There's but a little time, I know. I try not to think of it.

FEDERICO.

I cannot love—no, no!

LUCIA.

I love you.

FEDERICO.

Better you did not. Love a star rather.

LUCIA.

You are my star. I think happiness might be so easy. It's not what folks say, not far off but very near. It's as simple as loving: it *is* loving, I know. It's like the peace which comes to me at certain times. I've been peaceful in the Campo Santo, that sweet place of death. It was like swimming in cool water in summer: it wrapped my soul and body. Oh, the dead must be happy. I can't think of them in torment.

FEDERICO.

Torment is for the living. We come out of peace and fret and once more inherit peace.

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LUCIA.

Come with me, dearest, and forget all these dark books.

FEDERICO.

I have work to do. Work is an incantation: it summons peace and at times achieves it. To-night, Lucia, I'm full of strange thoughts. I believe I shall yet be famous.

LUCIA.

I should love you no more than now, though I should be proud to think you had loved me. You would leave me.

FEDERICO.

Oh, why should these thoughts consume me? The poor in spirit are truly blessed. But my spirit is the proudest devil that ever cried insults on the gods as it writhed in torments. Leave me, child, leave me to-night. I have a great experiment within my mind. This hour shall test it.

LUCIA.

And to-morrow? Will you be sweet to me to-morrow?

FEDERICO.

Aye, I'll be sweet. I feel that I shall rest to-morrow. These hours come to poets. Afterwards there's peace.

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LUCIA.

Are you not ill? May I not sit with you quietly? I'll be as quiet as a little mouse, Federico, and I'll not weep or be foolish. I do not care for dancing if you are not there. And they will say, "Sing to us, Lucia," and I shall sing sad songs, and they will not like them and be merry. Oh, let me stay!

FEDERICO.

You must not. I have that to do which none must know.

LUCIA.

Something—oh, is it——

FEDERICO.

Is it what, child?

LUCIA.

Is it—evil?

FEDERICO.

Why do you ask that?

LUCIA.

There's the strangest look in your eyes. It is like the light in a jewel which I once saw, a jewel unblessed which no religious heart could wear or place in a rosary. Tell me you'll pray?

FEDERICO.

Aye, I'll pray.

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LUCIA.

Heartily, Federico?

FEDERICO.

Oh, most heartily: with all my soul, with all that's I.

LUCIA.

And to God?

FEDERICO.

What is God?

LUCIA.

I know within me.

FEDERICO.

True, child. There's the sweetest spirit in you. I know no god that's sweeter. Would such a heart ruled the world. My own is a shrine for one who more resembles the deity men worship. He's eager, impatient, cruel, fierce and most ambitious.

LUCIA.

You speak dreadful things.

FEDERICO.

Oh, I'm perverse and suffer! Never say with fools that suffering makes men better. Without it we may be simple. Poor child, I frighten you.

LUCIA.

You look beyond me. What see you, Federico?

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FEDERICO.

Visions, visions always. That's the poet's curse and his blessing. Do they come of themselves or do we make them, child?

LUCIA.

I know not. I've seen none.

FEDERICO.

The more blessed you! They would say I was mad if they knew all I see.

LUCIA.

What do you see, Federico?

FEDERICO.

[*Puts his hand on her hair.*] At this hour—nothing. But in some the hairs upon my head stand up and my skin's like moistened parchment. Oh, I see strange things then! I ask you, do they come from outside or are they what my soul makes?

LUCIA.

They are evil or you would be blessed to behold them, like the Saints.

FEDERICO.

What is evil? We make it, think it and create it. But these visions are my own. That's power and genius, the greatest gift of what men call the Gods. Oh, we *are* gods! Go to your pleasures, child.

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LUCIA.

What pleasure can I have, Federico, unless you are there?

FEDERICO.

Some day you'll forget me.

LUCIA.

Never, never!

FEDERICO.

Years ago in Rome I loved a little maiden——

LUCIA.

Tell me of her.

FEDERICO.

I remember not her name. She died. Oh, you will forget mine!

LUCIA.

That's most unkind, dear Federico.

FEDERICO.

Aye, say so now! That's where nature has some kindness. Go, child, and dance. Go and sing to them if you can. Tell Giulio and Ettore that I sent you. They shall see me—at dawn.

LUCIA.

If you do not come we'll come to you.

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FEDERICO.

Do, child. Kiss me!

[She kisses him and goes, looking round the room.]

LUCIA.

[At the door.] Till I see you, dearest——

[Exit LUCIA.]

FEDERICO.

[Putting out one light on his table.] That's time lost and yet—I dread to be alone. I could call her back—I will not. There is power within me, such as Faustus had. There are terrible things within my heart. This I know. *[He walks up and down in agitation.]* I say the incantation and the spell that the great men of old did use was compelling thought! The centred mind can pull Jupiter from his orbit, and bring Venus from her golden court to earth. Thought is sorcery: in the heart is magic, the caduceus, the wand of hazel armed with steel. The celestial hierarchy is in my soul, and the infernal, Lucifer, Belzebuth and Astaroth and their dark ministers. The mind's the God: words are its ministers. Oh, in the heart are strange graves and there are resurrections from them. We need no talisman, no incantation but thought that's like a charm. There is nought real but that which doth affect us: these my thoughts are my lamp and deep runes to read. Heaven is within us; aye and hell! *[He stops and stares before him. The clock strikes eleven.]* I could see strange things;

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little white spirits, dark ghosts, larvæ and crawling devils! I'll blow out the light. [*Bends to the candle and blows it out. The room is lighted by a gibbous moon. The dim sound of chanting comes from the Cathedral, for matins begin at eleven on Christmas night. He cannot hear the priest, but suddenly the choir bursts out into "Venite exultemus Domino, jubilemus Deo salutari nostro" and this goes on dimly through the scene.*] There's power in darkness! Oh, her name was sweet! Annunziata! Had she lived I could have forgone ambition in sweet life. The gods, or devils, have reft her from me. Yet she lives, here in my brain and heart! That's immortality. I'd have my memory live in thousands and so preserve her. I will be famous! Come, great hour, come! I'll sit and think on it! [*Sits at the table in the moonlight.*] There's sweat upon my brow! Oh, if there be powers within me or without, I summon them. If there be spirits of evil or of good, or of the dead, I call upon them! Oh, what is that? [*He starts to his feet.*] It was as though I saw a little child singing in a meadow. Such was I before life tore me, ere I saw Bologna, or fair Pisa, its Tower and Duomo and the Baptistry where echoes dwell in the roof. I would not be that child again and endure what I have suffered, not for Pisa, or bright Paris, or seven-hilled Rome, or all the pearls and gems that the Orient gives; not to claim Venice's lion, couchant in her lagoons, to be king of sea-swept Tyre or of lofty Babylon, or to wed Zenobia of Palmyra in all its fame. Oh, these are

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earthly powers: the mind is lord! Homer slays Agamemnon and begat him. The old blind poet loved great Helen, and had Briseïs on his knee ere Achilles kissed her. I'd be greater! Hear me, dark thrones and dominations, if you do exist, come forth and speak to me! The hair upon my head doth bristle: my skin creeps in the darkness! Oh, but I can endure! They answer not! If there's a power within me, something great, some deep embodied knowledge, such as I have held in song and thesis in Rome and Bologna and here in Pisa, I summon forth that power. Aye, or the earthlier soul of me that I have quenched! [*The moon descends and darkness falls on him.*] Come, spirit that is here within me, come, if you tear my flesh in leaving me. Take flesh and form thyself, whether thou art endurable to vision or abominable, and stand before me! [*Steps come by outside. Passers by laugh sardonically. Their footsteps die away.*] Laughter of fools! Let the heavens break in thunder if they will! I can accomplish! I told the girl I'd pray. [*He kneels at the table.*] Thus to the god within me! When shall my hour arrive, my hour of greatness, when bells shall sound and people kneel, when I shall be most gravely spoken of? Oh, lift me on a throne! Have I not wrought songs that are prayers? Oh, by all the sacrifices now that the hour demands, of life or blood, of good or evil, I do adjure the knowledge that's in me to come forth!—There's something in me: power or—weakness! Oh, I'm strong to endure the pangs

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THE HOUR OF GREATNESS

that tear my breast! Ah, God—I'm weak, most weak!

[He falls face forward on the table. The darkness is now intense. But a very dim glow appears in front of him. In the circle of light a figure, as of MEPHISTOPHELES, stands and looks ghastly in the light. The figure sways. FEDERICO looks up.]

FEDERICO.

Ah, come you back, Giulio!

[There is no answer.]

FEDERICO.

[Stumbling to his feet.] Who—are you?

MEPHISTOPHELES.

[Faintly.] Call me—what you will.

FEDERICO.

You are a dream, a vision.

MEPHISTOPHELES.

[Hollowly.] Let it be so.

FEDERICO.

Have my conjurations and set prayers brought you forth from hell?

THE HOUR OF GREATNESS

MEPHISTOPHELES.

Give me more strength.

FEDERICO.

You ask of me?

MEPHISTOPHELES.

[*Putting out a hand.*] Of whom else, Federico?

FEDERICO.

You come forth from me?

MEPHISTOPHELES.

I do believe it: clothe me with more flesh. I'd have warmer blood in me. I cannot speak yet. Give me blood and flesh, that's the sacrament. Reach out thy hand.

[*Reaches out his hand.* FEDERICO *shrinks back.*

FEDERICO.

If I do what is asked of me, can you then answer?

MEPHISTOPHELES.

I can.

FEDERICO.

Reach out that hand then. [FEDERICO *touches the spirit's hand.*] Oh, you are cold as ice! You draw my heart out. You've taken much from me.

[*The light grows redder on MEPHISTOPHELES.*
He stands firmly.

THE HOUR OF GREATNESS

MEPHISTOPHELES.

But not ambition!

FEDERICO.

True, most true. That burns brighter as my strength goes.

MEPHISTOPHELES.

[*Almost jovially.*] Ha! I'm stronger now. These fleshly robes are warm. I think I see your heart alight with love of glory through the mist of flesh I've left you.

FEDERICO.

You are strong?

MEPHISTOPHELES.

Come, question me.

FEDERICO.

Shall I be famous?

MEPHISTOPHELES.

That's as may be. What is fame to mortals?

FEDERICO.

'Tis the humble looks of men: their speech of us: the bended knee, the air that marks respect and reputation——

MEPHISTOPHELES.

These shall, I think, be yours.

THE HOUR OF GREATNESS

FEDERICO.

Oh thanks, great spirit !

[*The psalm in the Duomo now begins, "Deus
judicium tuum Regi da : et justitiam tuam
filio regis."*

MEPHISTOPHELES.

Am I not—yourself ?

FEDERICO.

Yet you assume the figure of the sprite that Faustus
drew from hell !

MEPHISTOPHELES.

That's your thought, Federico ! Had you pictured
me as an Apollyon, clad in flame, or as Lucifer, or as
Belzebuth, or Sargatanos, or Nebiros, or as fire itself,
or as a serpent such as Eve delivered from the very
womb of thought, you had seen me—thus !

FEDERICO.

Then is it true that dreams and visions and dis-
coveries, all thaumaturgies, gods, devils, seraphim and
teraphs winged with fire, all devils and all bright
angels, are but dreams that we can make visible ?

MEPHISTOPHELES.

'Tis true. As you see me. And others !

FEDERICO.

What others, spirit ?

THE HOUR OF GREATNESS

MEPHISTOPHELES.

Look, Federico !

FEDERICO.

I see shapes about you. They are very dim. Why, they are beautiful and awful, sweet and strange. Oh, there's Annunziata ! Since she died I had not seen her ! [*He starts forward.*] Oh, she's gone, she's gone ! God, bring her back !

MEPHISTOPHELES.

I cannot. 'Tis your power, not mine. Had you but thought of her as you have done of your ambition she might have spoken.

FEDERICO.

I'd be remembered for her sake.

MEPHISTOPHELES.

You shall be, by some hearts.

FEDERICO.

I'd have the world remember. When shall men proclaim me ?

MEPHISTOPHELES.

Fame is uncertain, Federico, while the day we have is sure.

FEDERICO.

Shall it be this year that they shall kneel to me ?

THE HOUR OF GREATNESS

MEPHISTOPHELES.

It may be.

FEDERICO.

If there are yet years to come before my hour I'd have them blotted out.

MEPHISTOPHELES.

Why, then they whose praise you seek will be dead.

FEDERICO.

There'll be their sons and daughters.

MEPHISTOPHELES.

You'll be the nearer death.

FEDERICO.

I and Annunziata shall live in the hearts of thousands. That is life! It's immortality!

MEPHISTOPHELES.

Yet many, who were mighty, are now forgotten.

FEDERICO.

Oh, such as I can re-create them, give them words, brave words for fiery thoughts. Some poet yet unborn will write of me. I'll live like any spirit. Come, is it possible that you could bring the day for me and pour out the years between into oblivion?

THE HOUR OF GREATNESS

MEPHISTOPHELES.

Think of the joys of life.

FEDERICO.

I've found them nothing.

MEPHISTOPHELES.

Consider the rise and setting of the sun, the ample day, and the windy seas men sail on! Oh, think of them, Federico. Think of the vine, the chaplets of flowers you may yet weave for sunny locks: the kisses of glad maids that you sing to on your viol. Why, think of friends and even the tears that flow so happily at times. What songs you might sing betwixt now and this great hour of yours! All these you will lose, may be a great epic or some lyric sweet as an apple that may touch men's hearts much more deeply than you know.

[More clearly now sounds the verse of the same psalm: "Reges Tharsis et insulæ munera offerent, reges Arabum et Saba dona adducent."

FEDERICO.

I've thought enough, enough!

MEPHISTOPHELES.

[Laughing grimly.] I'm bent on enjoyment of the flesh while I have it, and I can't think how you can

THE HOUR OF GREATNESS

endure to make it older, Federico! Why, dream how merry you might be! Once I heard you sing songs full of laughter. Why, we giggled with a bevy of girls (in Bologna, I think, or fair Florence) and I smacked my lips at the songs. Would that I might keep this pretty flesh, though you've spoilt it by thinking, and live in it like a man. You'll miss these joys!

FEDERICO.

Oh, let them go!

MEPHISTOPHELES.

Think of Lucia. That's a pretty piece of flesh, as ever lived. She'll miss you and weep in bed instead of blushing. I like gay thoughts, and scarlet fancies. You see I can be merry, though you are but a sad master.

FEDERICO.

'Tis a sad world.

[*Psalm: "Sit nomen ejus benedictum in saecula:
ante solem permanet nomen ejus."*]

MEPHISTOPHELES.

Mad folk make it so, and you are a sad fool, Federico. Time's but our common passage into nothingness, and even spirits die in the end. Happiness should go hand in hand with life into the grave. The wisest is he who does what comes to him, eats and drinks and swaps kisses with Phyllis in a garden. Come, shall not I encourage you to live?

THE HOUR OF GREATNESS

FEDERICO.

If I achieve ambition's ends !

MEPHISTOPHELES.

It's a disease, a pestilence, a murrain, a plague, spotted fever, sweating-sickness : virus, rot, corruption, canker. It drowns a man to give him dreams of life. Would I desire the powers of Asmodeus, Moloch or Shedim ? Out on Ambition : the Vampire ! I'm a bright god to him ! I can laugh. Ambition has no laughter. If there's a good jest in Cæsar's Commentaries I'll turn it into rhyme and sing it.

FEDERICO.

You can accomplish what I will. Give me my great hour. I do command it.

MEPHISTOPHELES.

Fie on you, Ambition ! I know your voice. There's no sweetness in it. Look now, Federico, since my reasoning fails to move you I'll summon back your friends, sweet Lucia, capable Ettore and blithe Giulio, and they shall persuade you. I love Lucia myself, and would, if I could, keep this flesh about me. I summon them !

[Faint singing is heard in the distance. It comes nearer gradually until it is loud.]

FEDERICO.

I need them not. Away with them.

THE HOUR OF GREATNESS

MEPHISTOPHELES.

[*Laughing.*] I'd have you stay young, or I shall grow old myself and lose a job. A bad one's better than none. I might else serve a priest for punishment. Oh, here they come merrily! I could dance!

FEDERICO.

They will see you!

MEPHISTOPHELES.

It takes you for that, Federico. See me vanish!

[*The light in him fades. He retires and almost disappears. Enter ETTORE, singing, as FEDERICO re-lights a candle.*

ETTORE.

I thought I heard Federico speaking? Hath he a spirit or familiar? These blessed poets or damned bards have one ever to fetch and carry rhymes in a can, when they might carry wine. I tell you, Federico, a drink in season beats a lyric. Sing anacreontics if you will, for you told me they deal with wine and love.

[*Enter LUCIA and GIULIO, flushed and noisy.*

LUCIA.

Oh, Federico, we've been almost joyous! I thought I should have been so sad, since you were not there, but Giulio as the devil has been so merry that I

THE HOUR OF GREATNESS

could but laugh. And a stranger from Bologna, who knew your name——

FEDERICO.

Knew my name?

MEPHISTOPHELES.

A pox on Ambition!

GIULIO.

Aye, he said he knew you there and he told us of a wicked song you made on a sausage.

FEDERICO.

I was very young. Bah, on a sausage! So I did. I do remember it. 'Twas a trifle, a trifle!

LUCIA.

He bade us fetch you.

ETTORE.

So come, and we'll tell them you're not a poet but a man.

FEDERICO.

You persuade me not at all.

ETTORE.

Come, and we'll say what you will.

THE HOUR OF GREATNESS

GIULIO.

Come, Federico. I'm Mephistopheles, a gay and powerful devil from the richest quarter of the Inferno. I'll do all your behests! I' faith I will. I'll be an obedient devil and achieve your high ambitions.

FEDERICO.

[*Laughing wildly.*] Ha! That's strange. You touch more than you know. You'll bring me fame, Giulio?

GIULIO.

In truth I can with a cup of wine. Drink's your good devil who exalts. Sober I'm a poor mummer, but now I'm Mephisto in person and can make or break you, fetch you laurel or cypress, bay or lilies. Oh, drink with us and be famous. We'll be your world: Ettore shall be Duke, Lucia his daughter.

ETTORE.

Aye. I'll be the Grand Duke and give you my daughter for a sonnet.

FEDERICO.

You mock me.

ETTORE.

I feel wondrous kind. I could do the maddest things, too—but there's sadness here.,

THE HOUR OF GREATNESS

GIULIO.

The room is overdark. I feel Federico has changed since we left him. His eyes are haughty.

FEDERICO.

I'm to be famous, great !

LUCIA.

[*With her hand on his shoulder.*] Dearest !

ETTORE.

So shall we be before the feast is over.

LUCIA.

Are you not well, Federico ?

FEDERICO.

Aye, my child.

GIULIO.

Come away and dance with us ! I could leap over the moon.

ETTORE.

Aye, come, Federico.

FEDERICO.

I will not, cannot——

THE HOUR OF GREATNESS

ETTORE.

We'll dance about you.

GIULIO.

We command a dance ; we're all nobles, kings, and Federico is our Emperor.

[*They dance and sing about FEDERICO.*]

FEDERICO.

Poor fools ! Death waits for them and the obscurity of nameless dust. [*The sound of sorrowful chanting comes from the Cathedral.*] There's no fame for them. At most the passing-bell !

[*It strikes twelve. The chanting ceases. Then the Priest sings the Introit : " Dominus dixit ad me, Filius meus es tu : ego hodie genui te," and the choir sings, " Quare fremuerunt gentes et populi meditati sunt inania ? "*]

GIULIO.

At midnight a devil should be merry, but Federico takes the quality out of me !

ETTORE.

Our poet's dead already.

LUCIA.

Did you pray, Federico ?

THE HOUR OF GREATNESS

FEDERICO.

Aye.

LUCIA.

Did God answer?

ETTORE.

Sweet confessor, let the man be ; he's dead already.

[*The Priest intones : "Gloria in excelsis."*]

GIULIO.

To the devil with this darkness.

LUCIA.

Come, Federico. The hour and the music of the church make me sad.

GIULIO.

I'm a poor devil and have the shakes! Come away.

- ETTORE.

[*With an air of mock solemnity.*] I do remember my Federico well. Oh, but he was a man, so sweet, so noble of air, so pat of speech, so grave in poetic delivery. And now he's dead!

LUCIA.

Oh, do not speak so!

GIULIO.

Nobly delivered, Ettore. Could we but nobly deliver Federico from crape and cypress.

THE HOUR OF GREATNESS

FEDERICO.

My hour comes !

ETTORE.

The hour of one, methinks. When your hour arrives
I shall not be jealous !

LUCIA.

Oh, I shall mourn. Fame will take you from me.
Fame opens like a tomb and swallows up those we
love. And then we inhabit the bereaved earth alone.

FEDERICO.

'Tis poetically said. There's truth in it too.
There's no increase, no fulfilled desire, that saddens
none. I shall lose much, dear friends. Oh, if I be
cold and regard you not and answer nothing : if I be
estranged and silent, or but seem so ; if my ears are
closed to your entreaties and my eyes respond not to
your patient looks, and if my hand be shut, oh, think
of me as I was before this powerful ambition grew in
me. Leave me, I pray you !

[*The Priest chants : " Vere dignum et justum est,
aequum et salutare nos tibi semper et ubique
gratias agere. Domine sancte, Pater omni-
potens aeternae Deus."*]

LUCIA.

Must we ?

THE HOUR OF GREATNESS

FEDERICO.

Aye, you must. I wish I'd loved you better. There are moments I wish I'd been no poet, seen no visions—— [*The light on MEPHISTOPHELES brightens.*] Would I had been a peasant, one whom books touch not, being beyond him. Forgive me; take my love with you, as from one who dies. There's that which drives me on, and I must go, though it prove but ashes.

[*They go in silence, LUCIA last. She kisses his hand and hides her face as she goes out. The little bell rings and the choir bursts in with the "Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus Dom. Deus Sabaoth, Pleni sunt cæli et terra gloria tua. Hosanna in excelsis Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini. Hosanna in excelsis!" The light on MEPHISTOPHELES increases. He steps from his corner into the room.*]

MEPHISTOPHELES.

Humanity is assuredly the most miraculous thing in creation. Or so it seems to us spirits. I almost began to have hopes you'd dance and sing with them, Federico, and give up this great worship which you desire. There are those who would give it up for a crust,¹ a flask and a ripe fig.

FEDERICO.

I am what I am!

THE HOUR OF GREATNESS

MEPHISTOPHELES.

'Tis a sad sight!

[One strikes heavily. A solitary passer by sings.]

FEDERICO.

That's like a passing-bell.

MEPHISTOPHELES.

True. And every time one sounds we say, "There go a crowd of houseless spirits, all out in the cold!" Death's a bankruptcy, a discharge of good warm spirits. Oh, it's pitiful; Think again, Federico, ere you grow older.

FEDERICO.

I have thought. Oh, thought is heavier than any iron crown.

MEPHISTOPHELES.

There should be a passing bell for the years, or days, or hours, that lie betwixt your throne and you, Federico. Ere I work this miracle shall I put thoughts into the sleepy head of the bell-ringer and let him imagine a great man dies?

FEDERICO.

Can you do this?

MEPHISTOPHELES.

'Tis but to beget a dream in a thick head: an undigested lump of meat may do it. Shall not

THE HOUR OF GREATNESS

a noble spirit of fire and cloud, the very swift tissues of your brain, do so much? I will inspire our bellman. Ha! Now he sweats and grunts, "The Bishop's dying"; now he hears his name called by a running deacon or the sacristan! He clothes himself, sweats and curses, prays. Federico, his hand is on the bell-rope: the clapper swings. Hear the dread sound!

[*The passing bell rings and FEDERICO trembles.*]

FEDERICO.

Oh, dreadful spirit!

MEPHISTOPHELES.

Shall I show your power! your power, not mine?
Or is it destiny?

FEDERICO.

I—do command it.

[*The bell sounds.*]

MEPHISTOPHELES.

Time passes.

FEDERICO.

[*With his hand upon his heart.*] The bell, the bell!
[*The bell sounds.*]

MEPHISTOPHELES.

Your hour may be to-morrow, or next year. Consider now in the interval of the bell—[*It sounds again*—a whole year passes! Hear the trampling

THE HOUR OF GREATNESS

days go jostling from the tower. I see them fly like bats in the dark! Oh do you fear, Federico?

FEDERICO.

[*With his hand upon the table.*] Aye. I fear, but
can resist it! [The bell sounds.]

MEPHISTOPHELES.

Oh, man shall kneel to you!

FEDERICO.

Ah, in my heart I feel it!

MEPHISTOPHELES.

Say farewell—to all your friends. [The bell tolls.]

FEDERICO.

To all?

MEPHISTOPHELES.

To sweet Lucia.

FEDERICO.

[*Sighing.*] Aye, Lucia.

MEPHISTOPHELES.

She'll weep to see you pass her by, uplifted,
crowned! I do perceive flowers about you.

[The bell tolls.]

THE HOUR OF GREATNESS

FEDERICO.

Wreaths and laurels ?

MEPHISTOPHELES.

White lilies and dark cypress !

FEDERICO.

Is the time at hand ?

MEPHISTOPHELES.

It comes. Can you pray ?

FEDERICO.

Unto what spirit ?

MEPHISTOPHELES.

To that which doth accomplish ! [*The bell tolls, the sound of distant thunder.*] Oh, there's time, it may be, yet to restrain the years !

FEDERICO.

I will not. Give me——

MEPHISTOPHELES.

So be it—as it must be. I am but your hand.

THE HOUR OF GREATNESS

FEDERICO.

[*Wildly.*] Pull the years down, the years that intervene and bar me from my triumph! I behold myself crowned with bay and laurel, see the wondering people, and hear the mighty murmurs that shall salute me. Oh, I am great! [*The bell tolls.*]

MEPHISTOPHELES.

None greater. Here at last comes Majesty!

[FEDERICO runs forward, stares, as though he sees a vision, and clutches at his heart.]

FEDERICO.

Oh, majesty!

MEPHISTOPHELES.

It is accomplished!

[*The bell again and the sound of nigh thunder.*]

FEDERICO.

[*With a loud cry.*] Ah! My hour of greatness!

[*Utter darkness falls. But the bell still tolls. It dies down and the thunder passes. Then very slowly the dim light of dawn enters through the window. There is rumour outside and movement, and the sound of chanting from the Cathedral where the second mass at the Break of Day begins. The Priest sings:—"Lux fulgebit hodie super nos, quia natus est nobis dominus."*]

THE HOUR OF GREATNESS

His voice fades away as the wind closes the window. As the light grows a bier of black velvet is seen in the middle of the room. On it lies FEDERICO with flowers about him. Kneeling by it are LUCIA, weeping; ETTORE in his pierrot dress and GIULIO as MEPHISTOPHELES

CURTAIN.

THE LAMP OF GOD

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

"The spirit of Man is the Lamp of God, where-with he searcheth out the inwardness of all secrets."

CHARACTERS

MARY, *an old woman*

MAGDALEN, *who is not yet old*

CRYSTAL, *a beautiful girl*

HELEN, *who is younger than CRYSTAL*

FATHER THOMAS, *a Priest*

MARK, *a Poet*

Place: A great City

Time: Any time

THE LAMP OF GOD

The scene of the action is an old high garret with sloping walls and a dormer window, looking out on dying light. The door is at the back of the room. The floor is broken and uneven: the paper hangs from the walls in damp and mildewed festoons. One pane of the window is blocked with old rags. In the centre is a table, and on it a white cloth, like a shroud, covers a bundle of work which looks like a coffin. There is an unlighted lamp on the table. Three women, MARY, who is old and has white hair; MAGDALEN whose hair is still dark, and HELEN who has golden hair, are seated under the fading light, working with the needle. They are silent as the curtain rises and continue silent for a long minute.

MARY.

Is there any oil in the lamp?

MAGDALEN.

A very little, Mary.

THE LAMP OF GOD

HELEN.

[*Rising and looking out of the window.*] They have lighted the lamps in the street.

[*She sits down and there is a pause.*]

MARY.

There is still a little oil in my lamp.

[*The others look up at her wondering, but go on working.*]

MAGDALEN.

Your lamp, Mary?

MARY.

Life is a little flame——

MAGDALEN.

In a cup of earth. I remember—— [*She pauses.*]

HELEN.

What do you remember?

MAGDALEN.

When my lamp was bright.

MARY.

To remember——[*She looks up.*] The sun has set.

HELEN.

Did I not say the lamps were alight in the street?

THE LAMP OF GOD

MAGDALEN.

'Tis too dark to work.

MARY.

My hand bleeds. Child, get some oil.

[HELEN *lays down her work and goes out by the door.*]

MAGDALEN.

We—remember too much, Mary. It is not well for Helen——

MARY.

Has she a lover? To-day I've forgotten the name of the dear man who loved me. But I saw him buried. [*She looks up at MAGDALEN and laughs.*] And yours yet lives. Why did he leave you?

MAGDALEN.

For God. It was a sin to love me, though his wife left him.

MARY.

There's no sin—if a body sews and thinks.

MAGDALEN.

There's life! And death!

MARY.

And we that should have made life, make shrouds.

THE LAMP OF GOD

MAGDALEN.

For folks in the City who know it not. We make for them!

MARY.

I've such strange cold thoughts in me as those. Helen and Crystal have other thoughts.

MAGDALEN.

What thoughts?

MARY.

Thoughts of lovers. Mine is dead. They said I was sinful, but I cannot remember any great sin. Would that I could. Why does not Crystal come back? She has a lover!

MAGDALEN.

Hush! She'll bring more work.

[The room is now very dark.]

MARY.

I trust she'll be brave.

MAGDALEN.

She's brave and sweet.

MARY.

Love is what she needs, and she has it. I saw it in her eyes.

THE LAMP OF GOD

MAGDALEN.

They're a maid's eyes.

MARY.

Aye, and she's beautiful. I'd rather be a young street woman than good and old.

MAGDALEN.

You shall not say such things to Crystal!

MARY.

I'll speak what's in my heart. Was that a footstep on the stair?

MAGDALEN.

I heard none.

MARY.

I always hear footsteps. I hear them coming always.

MAGDALEN.

That's Crystal, now.

MARY.

Does she bring more white linen?

MAGDALEN.

Her step is light.

[A step outside is now heard plainly. The door opens, and CRYSTAL, a beautiful half-starved girl comes in, carrying nothing. Her voice sounds strange and wild.]

THE LAMP OF GOD

CRYSTAL.

You are in the dark!

MARY.

We knew you had brought no more white linen, Crystal. What does the master say?

CRYSTAL.

He had none for me, Mary. He said folks to ruin him had forsworn death, and that the plague was everywhere but in our City. "Send me where it is," said he, "and I'll cure 'em. If I bought an angel in the markets of heaven he'd moult or have the moth."

MARY.

Angels! In a cage! Aye, they sell them in the market.

MAGDALEN.

There's still more work here, Crystal, when the oil comes.

MARY.

'Tis the foolish virgins have the oil.

CRYSTAL.

I'll do no more work.

MARY.

I would I'd done less.

THE LAMP OF GOD

MAGDALEN.

What do you mean, child ?

CRYSTAL.

I'm to keep house.

MAGDALEN.

Ah !

MARY.

'Tis your poet, Crystal, the man with the shut up wife that laughs night and day ?

MAGDALEN.

She must not do this, Mary !

MARY.

She shall ! You'll go with him, Crystal ?

CRYSTAL.

Or die here, hourly. Did you not tell me I was—
beautiful ?

[She kneels by MARY who strokes her hair.]

MARY.

Aye, child. You are very beautiful, though so poor and pale.

MAGDALEN.

He'll leave her unwed. She'll be paler yet.

THE LAMP OF GOD

CRYSTAL.

I'll wither in the sun then. He tells me of a wild sweet moor, Mary, and of a little, little house by a wood. There will be stars above us. I'll—I'll be his lamp. Oh, he has beautiful thoughts to tell me.

MAGDALEN.

It's a sin. And he'll leave you.

MARY.

Fool! She'll have her hour, as you had yours, Magdalen, sin or none, and are glad!

CRYSTAL.

He'll love me always, or for a long time, or for a dear little while. And death always comes. There's a deep pool in the moorland——

MAGDALEN.

You speak dreadfully.

CRYSTAL.

[*Passionately.*] In a dreadful house, among the white clothes of death! I'll not endure it any more nor the lonely nights and—and thoughts that come——

MARY.

To a lonely maid!

THE LAMP OF GOD

MAGDALEN.

There's the time after death——

CRYSTAL.

And that before it.

MAGDALEN.

He'll grow weary of you.

CRYSTAL.

I shall know it ere he does.

MAGDALEN.

Wait, wait and let him wed you.

MARY.

I—waited!

CRYSTAL.

Time is an endless thread! Oh, I'll sew no more for the pale folk who have waited. I'll sew for myself or——

MARY.

For a little child!

MAGDALEN.

Hush, Mary, hush! There are steps upon the stairs.

THE LAMP OF GOD

CRYSTAL.

'Tis Helen!

[HELEN enters with the oil and pours it into the lamp with a shaking hand.

HELEN.

It's dark here. They are merry in the street.
Has Crystal come back?

CRYSTAL.

I'm here, Helen.

[She goes to her and kisses her. HELEN strikes a match and holds it to CRYSTAL's face.

HELEN.

Why—do you kiss me? Oh, I know!

CRYSTAL.

Light the lamp, Helen.

MARY.

Her lamp, her lamp! Oh, the wise old women have no oil.

[HELEN lights the lamp. She takes hold of CRYSTAL.

HELEN.

You are going?

THE LAMP OF GOD

MARY.

She'll work no more, child.

HELEN.

No more ?

CRYSTAL.

I'll not prick my life in its heart any more.

[MARY *laughs and, bending, speaks apart to*
MAGDALEN, *who makes a gesture of horror.*

MARY.

I could say things, I could.

HELEN.

Is it—Mark ?

CRYSTAL.

He needs me.

HELEN.

A young man in the street offered to kiss me, and I—struck him. Why did I do that ?

MARY.

Ask another fool. Oh, it's a foolish world where kisses might be plenty.

MAGDALEN.

What would the old priest, Father Ambrose, say to these words, Mary ?

THE LAMP OF GOD

CRYSTAL.

It's death here.

[Touches the shrouds and shivers.

MARY.

Priests and the people of God are mad. Oh, there are sad folk in heaven to-day thinking of their lost lives on the old earth.

MAGDALEN.

Such are not in heaven. Who is that upon the stair?

CRYSTAL.

Maybe he that you work for.

MARY.

Or death! 'Tis a strange new step. But I've heard death upon the stair.

CRYSTAL.

I'll work no more.

[There is a knock at the door as the others sit down to their tasks. A PRIEST comes in.

PRIEST.

Is this where Mary and Magdalen are?

MARY.

I am Mary.

THE LAMP OF GOD

PRIEST.

It is a blessed name and blesses this room.

[HELEN *turns up the lamp.*

MARY.

It never blessed me. Did Father Ambrose send you?

PRIEST.

And his blessing. He is ill.

HELEN.

We—we thought it was the master for whom we work, who was coming up the stair.

MARY.

[*Laughing.*] So he was, child, so he was! We work like this so that we can be good and live for his Master's glory.

MAGDALEN.

[*In a low voice and with bent head.*] Mary, Mary!

CRYSTAL.

What mean you, Mary?

PRIEST.

Who are these—children?

THE LAMP OF GOD

MARY.

They are what you see, father. This is Crystal, my dead sister's child, and little Helen grew somewhere.

MAGDALEN.

[*Without raising her head from her work.*] Voices come back to me, after long years, out of the past.

MARY.

Heed her not, father. Such words come at times to us who are dead.

MAGDALEN.

Be good, dear Crystal. Oh, shrouds for the past, the dead past!

PRIEST.

[*Suddenly.*] Who spoke?

CRYSTAL.

It was Magdalen.

PRIEST.

Her voice sounded like—an echo. My—my daughter!

[*He approaches MAGDALEN. She rises and drops her work and stares at him and screams aloud.*]

MAGDALEN.

Daughter! Oh God!

THE LAMP OF GOD

MARY.

At times she's like this, father !

CRYSTAL.

Magdalen !

[She goes to her.]

MAGDALEN.

At times, at times, remembering——

PRIEST.

[In agitation.] Show me your face, woman.

MAGDALEN.

That's better than—daughter !

[She turns to him and he comes closer and falls back.]

PRIEST.

My God ! You—you——

MAGDALEN.

'Tis I !

MARY.

What's this, Magdalen ?

[HELEN comes down to them as MARY rises.]

MAGDALEN.

Ask him, Mary.

CRYSTAL.

You know him ?

THE LAMP OF GOD

MAGDALEN.

Aye!

PRIEST.

Father in heaven——

MAGDALEN.

He was my lover, and left me.

PRIEST.

I could not wed you. And then—she died, and the church called me.

MARY.

The world's a little dark room. And a little, little window to the sky, and a dim lamp in it, and folks make shrouds for their own sins. There's blood on the needle, blood!

[She looks at her hands.]

MAGDALEN.

Aye, but I was happy.

MARY.

My child died and my man.

HELEN.

[Holding CRYSTAL.] Shall we be old like this?

THE LAMP OF GOD

CRYSTAL.

Aye, we shall be very old.

PRIEST.

Magdalen, Magdalen !

MAGDALEN.

Had he stayed I could have endured.

HELEN.

I shall be old—like this !

CRYSTAL.

There's time, but you shall not spill your blood on shrouds.

PRIEST.

What are you saying, child ?

MAGDALEN.

'Tis better to have had a lover. I remember mine, but God made a white priest of him.

MARY.

My man died. He smiled and died.

PRIEST.

These children——

THE LAMP OF GOD

CRYSTAL.

Can children sew for the dead?

HELEN.

Crystal, hold me close! I want some one to hold me.

CRYSTAL.

[*Looking towards the door.*] Mark comes! He comes.

MARY.

I used to know my man's step.

[*MAGDALEN sits again and takes up her work and works furiously.*]

CRYSTAL.

I know his far off. I heard it in the market place before I knew him.

MAGDALEN.

There were children's steps with his, were there not?

MARY.

A lover's step sounds in the empty stairs that lead to a woman's heart, before she knows him. Her heart is a vacant room made fair for him, and sometimes his ghost enters and she sees it.

CRYSTAL.

Mark comes!

THE LAMP OF GOD

MARY.

He's married, father. There's thoughts for you!

CRYSTAL.

She's mad, poor thing, and shut up, singing and happy.

MARY.

Would that I were young! He's a poet, father.

MAGDALEN.

He'll leave her, and with a child that has no name——

CRYSTAL.

I'll call him sweet names! Oh, they will come to me out of my heart.

[HELEN comes to CRYSTAL and embraces her and
CRYSTAL whispers to her.

PRIEST.

How can such as I speak to her, dear Father in Heaven?

[*He stands and prays silently.*

MARY.

In heaven?

MAGDALEN.

Speak as you spoke to me—about man's abiding love——

THE LAMP OF GOD

CRYSTAL.

So Love comes I care not if he abides. There are steps upon the stair——

[The others turn and listen, but no steps are heard.]

HELEN.

Do you hear them, Crystal?

CRYSTAL.

In the street——

HELEN.

I seem to hear steps too.

CRYSTAL.

They shall come to you, dear.

MAGDALEN.

And depart. I heard steps go and a man weeping. A dry-eyed woman, without a child, heard them.

MARY.

Four men's steps were my man's when he went away.

PRIEST.

God the Father, and Christ His Son, and Mary the Mother of God, hear and help me!

THE LAMP OF GOD

CRYSTAL.

There are steps upon the stairs! Mark comes to me.

[They listen, and there are firm, strong steps upon the stairs. The PRIEST goes to CRYSTAL and plucks at her sleeve. She shakes her head and moves towards the door.]

PRIEST.

Girl, listen——

CRYSTAL.

I hear my lover!

[There is a knock at the door. It opens and MARK comes in. He goes straight to CRYSTAL and takes her in his arms and kisses her.]

MARK.

My beloved!

CRYSTAL.

Take me out of darkness.

MAGDALEN.

[Without looking up.] He will, perhaps, become a priest.

MARY.

I remember, I remember! It's agony: it's joy!

[The PRIEST moves towards the lovers.]

THE LAMP OF GOD

MARK.

Who is this?

MARY.

A priest.

MAGDALEN.

I remember when my man was not a priest.

PRIEST.

You have a wife. You cannot do this sin.

MAGDALEN.

When sin is thought of where is Love? Four men's steps carry out Love.

MARY.

Women must make shrouds for dear dead Love!

HELEN.

[*Sobbing and going to MARY.*] Don't, don't!

MARK.

Crystal!

CRYSTAL.

Will you love me a little while, just a dear little while, Mark?

MARY.

She'd have something to remember. That's wise. She's wise. So's little Helen. Something to remember!

THE LAMP OF GOD

MAGDALEN.

When he's a white priest.

PRIEST.

Think, child, think! And you, man!

CRYSTAL.

We've thought these many days.

MARK.

Shall she perish here?

PRIEST.

Bless her with pure love.

MAGDALEN.

White priest, white priest!

CRYSTAL.

I'll not take from him and give him nothing.
Giving is our gain, father.

PRIEST.

O! God forbids it!

MARK.

[*Pointing at the others.*] Does he forbid this misery?

THE LAMP OF GOD

PRIEST.

They who endure shall be blessèd.

MAGDALEN.

I have endured.

MARY.

He'll talk of the will of God presently. They are strange folk these priests.

MARK.

Is God so cruel?

PRIEST.

His purposes——

[MARY *laughs* and MAGDALEN *goes on sewing*
and HELEN *takes a shroud and sits by her.*

CRYSTAL.

Mark!

MARK.

Our hours go!

MAGDALEN.

I never hear the clocks now. Time went out with Love. At midnight——

CRYSTAL.

Poor souls. Oh, Mark, it's an agony to leave them. Can I be happy?

HELEN.

Go, Crystal! I cannot bear it.

THE LAMP OF GOD

PRIEST.

Listen, listen! If I sinned, I suffered. God help me. Here, in this hour, 'tis hard to believe. If, indeed, I have wrought for nothing, for nothing——

MAGDALEN.

When I prayed I was not answered.

MARK.

Where is this God?

MARY.

White shrouds for the people who go to Him.

MAGDALEN.

This is for a little girl dying of love.

MARY.

Poor thing, poor thing!

HELEN.

It might be—for me!

MARK.

Priest, call louder! Has your God gone on a journey, with his angels of pity?

PRIEST.

I have heard angels——

MARY.

Pity's a blind angel and she weeps.

THE LAMP OF GOD

PRIEST.

And now I hear nothing. God, God——

MARY.

I hear the unborn crying in the hearts of all barren women and those who are not loved.

MAGDALEN.

Do *you* hear that, Mary? I thought none heard it but myself. For its cry is a thin cry, exceeding bitter, and in my heart it sets its nails.

[HELEN *cries out as if in pain and goes over to*
MAGDALEN.

MARK.

Father, does God hear that child's cry?

PRIEST.

Christ loved children——

MARY.

Born in wedlock, to be sure, to be sure! Else had Christ sinned, Father.

PRIEST.

He loved all children——

MARK.

Come, Crystal.

THE LAMP OF GOD

MAGDALEN.

These shrouds are not ready. The master will be coming.

*[She falls to work again, and so does MARY.
They work like automatons.]*

MARY.

Come, Helen.

[But HELEN goes and kisses CRYSTAL.]

PRIEST.

[Praying as if alone.] Father in heaven and Christ on earth have pity on us!

MAGDALEN.

[Dropping the work as if she heard that voice for the first time.] The white priest prays with my dead man's voice.

PRIEST.

Magdalen, Magdalen!

MAGDALEN.

The master will be coming with a little white silver. It was my man's voice: he went out crying, "Magdalen, Magdalen!"

MARK.

[Laying hold of the PRIEST.] Can you endure this?

THE LAMP OF GOD

HELEN.

Magdalen, dear Magdalen!

MAGDALEN.

My man was my god—and he went away, away!

HELEN.

[*To the PRIEST.*] Oh, comfort her! There's death in her face.

MARY.

Labour, labour and tears and the rending of white linen!
[*She tears a piece of linen and laughs.*]

CRYSTAL.

[*To the PRIEST*] Comfort her.

MARK.

Go to her!

MARY.

I hear them ask a gift from a man of God.

MARK.

There is no God but human love and he cries like a little child.

PRIEST.

[*As if awaking from a dream.*] Did I hear God speak?

MARY.

'Twas the sinful poet, father.

THE LAMP OF GOD

PRIEST.

Or was it Christ, speaking again with a man's voice?

MARY.

What other way can he speak, father?

CRYSTAL.

But out of the heart of man?

PRIEST.

That's true. It sounds very true to me, children.
[*He leans on MARK.*] Am I yet living? Is this yet the world?

MARY.

Young, and old, and a dim lamp and white linen and the blood of the innocent.

PRIEST.

Magdalen!

[*He approaches her but she goes on sewing more and more slowly and feebly.*]

MAGDALEN.

I hear my lover's voice. But he left me to find out the ways of God.

CRYSTAL.

Take her in your arms.

THE LAMP OF GOD

PRIEST.

Magdalen !

MAGDALEN.

Who speaks to me ?

PRIEST.

'Tis I—I !

MAGDALEN.

[*Looking up slowly.*] Did you not die years ago ?
[*He kneels before her.*]

MARY.

The poor man prays. There is a good God in some hearts.

PRIEST.

Dear Magdalen !

MAGDALEN.

My man said that, long years ago !

MARY.

Years ago.

MAGDALEN.

Are you—he ?

PRIEST.

[*Taking her hands.*] I've come back to you !

THE LAMP OF GOD

MARY.

Labour and white linen and death for a little silver.
My man cannot come back.

MARK.

Speak to her again, again.

CRYSTAL.

[*Supporting* MAGDALEN.] Speak louder.

PRIEST.

Magdalen !

[MAGDALEN *raises her head and looks at him dully and then a great intelligence comes into her face and she cries out joyfully.*

MAGDALEN.

My man, my man !

[*She falls into his arms and he lays her down on the white linen and CRYSTAL holds her.*

PRIEST.

Belovèd !

MAGDALEN.

He has come back. My belovèd !

MARY.

There's great agony in love.

THE LAMP OF GOD

MAGDALEN.

Kiss me!

[He kisses her.]

PRIEST.

Magdalen!

MAGDALEN.

[Faintly.] I cannot hear you. Speak louder!

PRIEST.

Magdalen, Magdalen!

MAGDALEN.

I cannot see you. Helen, turn up the lamp! It's dark, but he is with me, with me!

MARK.

She's dying!

CRYSTAL.

Her god is with her.

[She puts one arm about MARK's neck as he kneels by MAGDALEN's head.]

MAGDALEN.

Hold me closer, beloved. I'm happy!

MARY.

[Rising.] This shroud is done. Magdalen!

MARK.

Hush! She cannot answer.

THE LAMP OF GOD

MAGDALEN.

He has—come—home!

[She dies, and HELEN, weeping, covers her face as the others kneel. She kneels with them. Then the priest rises.]

PRIEST.

I have come back! Crystal!

CRYSTAL.

Yes, father.

PRIEST.

I am your brother. *[He covers his face.]* Mark!

MARK.

Father!

PRIEST.

An old man's blessing on you both.

MARY.

But the master will be coming for the shrouds!
He will be coming, and they are not ready, not ready!
Helen! Helen!

[But HELEN rises and goes to the window.]

HELEN.

I'll sew no more.

THE LAMP OF GOD

MARY.

If I were young, I would not. Who comes, who comes?

CRYSTAL.

There is a step upon the stairs.

[They all turn as there is a knock, thrice repeated, on the door.]

CURTAIN.

THE WHITE HORSE
A DRAMATIC FRAGMENT
IN ONE ACT

CHARACTERS

LORD GEOFFREY

LORD HERBERT, *his cousin*

LADY MARY, *Geoffrey's wife*

HENRY, *an old retainer*

ALICE, *the housekeeper*

Place : A castle

Time : Long ago

THE WHITE HORSE

The scene where the action takes place is an old oak-panelled hall with stained glass windows at the back. On the walls are sombre and ancient portraits and dim figured tapestry, and against them stand heavy chairs and oaken chests, carved with heraldic shields. In the centre of the hall is a low bier, draped with black velvet, on which lies the figure of a young and beautiful woman with her hands crossed upon her bosom. Between her hands is a stem of great lilies, and lilies lie upon the bier. Leaning on the bier against her feet is a hatchment having the lady's arms impaled with her husband's with the sinister half of the ground black. Outside a gale with snow rages, and the mournful rhythm of the wind is heard, now loud, now soft. Through the clouds the moon shows at times and is again blotted out. There are doors into the hall both on the right and left. They are closed when the curtain rises and shows HENRY and ALICE, who are seated in chairs on either side of the bier, at the head and side of which are lighted candles.

THE WHITE HORSE

ALICE.

'Tis a sore blow for my dear lord. She was so young and beautiful.

HENRY.

Aye, a sore and heavy blow, dame. [*He rises with difficulty and looks at his dead lady and crosses himself.*]

Dame, she is more beautiful, even more beautiful now.

[*He sits down again.*]

ALICE.

That's true, Henry, but she's dead and what is beauty then? I was beautiful once but it faded slowly as her's will quickly, quickly. We two were at the wedding, a merry merry time—for all but one.

HENRY.

Aye, all but one.

ALICE.

It was my lord who looked then as if he would go first, for he was but a pale man and not so strong as others. But now 'tis he who is alive and weeping in the room she loved.

HENRY.

Alive! Aye, it's hard at first, and gets harder still. Some wounds don't heal, dame. My wife died when I was at the wars with my lord Geoffrey's father, when I was a strong man and one the maids turned to look

THE WHITE HORSE

at. I never saw her dead face. Death who rides in the battle spared me but passed me on my way home.

ALICE.

'Tis better to see one's love in the grave than to know her wedded to another, Henry.

HENRY.

I could have thought so once.

ALICE.

Think you, is my lord Herbert so grieved at this ill-fortune, he who loved her when she gave her heart to his young cousin?

HENRY.

He cannot be so grieved.

ALICE.

I've seen him look dreadful here, dreadful. But he may sleep sound now within these walls, this bitter night of storm.

HENRY.

To be out in it were death! Hark how it blows!

ALICE.

There will be snow, snow on my bonny lady's grave——

THE WHITE HORSE

HENRY.

Be silent, dame: your tongue goes ever like a brook. Hush, listen! What was that?

ALICE.

Oh, nothing, nothing, Henry, but the wind. It sobs round the outer walls and the moat like—like——

HENRY.

Like a spirit—a lost spirit!

ALICE.

Hush, how can you speak of lost spirits with my blessed white lady there?

HENRY.

[*Rising.*] None could come into her presence. It is not good to speak of them, I know.

ALICE.

[*Weeping.*] My lady, my dear lady!

[HENRY goes softly to the window and draws further apart the parted curtains just as the moon comes out of a drift of cloud.]

HENRY.

Aye, there is snow, deep snow: the very wind is clad in a winding sheet. But the storm passes: soon

THE WHITE HORSE

the wind will be still in the heavy frost. The whole sad world is white. There is frost upon the pane.

[He rubs his finger upon the glass and makes a sound.]

ALICE.

[Half rising from her chair.] Oh, what is that?

HENRY.

[Querulously.] I but rubbed my finger on the casement, dame.

ALICE.

Was it that I heard?

HENRY.

[Returning to his chair.] What heard you?

ALICE.

Henry, it was like a sigh—methinks the soul of our lady's mother might be with us mourning for her untimely death.

HENRY.

Is it not said that the blessèd are joyful to receive those who pass?

ALICE.

Aye, but my lady's mother was kin to this house and would mourn to know her childless.

THE WHITE HORSE

HENRY.

An old wise man told me once that when a young wife died without a child the spirits of the children that should have been hers stand round about the bier, holding each a light, and when she is buried and the good words spoken over her, her blessed spirit sees them and calls them her children.

ALICE.

It is a sweet thought, Henry, but somehow it affrights me. I could think I saw a little naked child hold each taper there! Methinks the dark hall is full of spirits. I feel a chill wind in it. Holy Jesu save us, what was that?

HENRY.

Only the wind, foolish woman, the wind among the towers, or maybe rats in the wainscot, or a creeping mouse, or perchance a groan from him who weeps. Ah, here he comes!

[LORD GEOFFREY enters the hall and moves as if unconscious of his servants. He comes down to the foot of the bier and stands there a long minute looking at the dead, and then, with a sigh which is almost a cry, leaves her and goes out by the other door as if in fear.]

THE WHITE HORSE

HENRY.

He never loved death.

ALICE.

He loved the dead. [*There is a long pause and then a sound like a sigh.*] Did you sigh, Henry?

HENRY.

No, dame, no! Not I—I——

ALICE.

[*Rising, with averted head and holding her hand between her and the bier.*] Did you then hear naught?

HENRY.

Aye, but one hears strange things in old houses.
The wind——

ALICE.

The wind! There's no wind now, but my flesh creeps on my old bones and the hair stirs upon my head! My very blood is cold!

HENRY.

[*Rising and going to her round the foot of the bier.*]
Aye, it's cold, very cold. I—would fain sit nearer to you, dame Alice.

THE WHITE HORSE

ALICE.

Stay! What was that? Didst hear aught?

HENRY.

No, but you—you shake! I'll get you a cordial, dame, a cordial.

ALICE.

'Twas in my cold mind maybe. I'll go, Henry, I'll go.

HENRY.

Nay, dame, if you go, I go. I cannot stay alone in this dim hall.

ALICE.

One must remain with the dead, Henry. They tell most fearful things of evil spirits troubling even the blessed dead if they be left alone.

HENRY.

The saints and her little unborn children will guard her. I must come with you. Ah, what was that?

ALICE.

Nothing, nothing!

[They go away together, but HENRY leaves his cloak upon ALICE'S chair. Once more, as

THE WHITE HORSE

they quit the hall, there is a wail of the wind as if it died and grieved, and then there is quiet. But there comes an audible sigh from the bier, and the lilies in LADY MARY'S hand tremble and she breathes and stirs. She uncrosses her hands and lets one fall by her side. The moon shines in through the casement.

LADY MARY.

[*In the voice of one who dreams.*] My lord! Geoffrey, is it morning? Oh, I am cold; come near me, love! [*Her hand stirs and she feels the velvet with her fingers.*] Ah, what is this, this? [*She opens her eyes and raises her head.*] Lilies, lilies and lighted tapers! It's—a dream, a dream! [*She closes her eyes and prays.*] Holy Virgin and Saint Catharine help me now. [*She repeats the Hail Mary in a terrified whisper.*] Oh, am I living or among the dead? Mary, Mother Mary help me in this hour! [*And slowly she rises as if distraught, and rests upon her left hand, half-sitting, and stares before her with strange eyes.*] Was it yesterday I rode with Geoffrey on the hills, yestereve that I went to our bed laughing, yestereve that I saw our cousin! Help, help! [*After this cry, which comes very suddenly, she waits with her hands to her head, and when there is no answer she arises from the bier, throwing down the lilies, and stands all in white with loosed dark hair.*] If I be dead then earthly fire shall not

THE WHITE HORSE

burn ! [*With a slim hand she touches the flame of a taper and draws back shrinking from it. But she is joyful to know she lives and is not numbered among those who feel no pain.*] I am alive, alive ; no spirit, but alive ! Holy Mother, where is Geoffrey, Geoffrey ?

[*There is again a howl of the wind and the casement bursts open. The blast extinguishes the feeble tapers and the hall is lighted only by the moon. At that moment steps are heard, and LORD GEOFFREY, entering and seeing no one and no lights, calls out.*

LORD GEOFFREY.

Henry, Henry !

[*But LADY MARY runs to him out of the shadows into the wan light of the moon.*

LADY MARY.

Geoffrey, Geoffrey !

[*He turns towards her voice and, seeing her white figure, sinks in amazement and terror to his knees, and he cries out to God, not to her.*

LORD GEOFFREY.

Now, O Lord, pardon me my offences, and my rebellion against thy judgment, for I have grievously sinned——

THE WHITE HORSE

LADY MARY.

Geoffrey, Geoffrey!

LORD GEOFFREY.

Oh, Thou who helpest those who believe in Thee! The dead—the dead arise and cry to me! Back, back—to the grave! Oh, merciful Father, be merciful to me and I will do thy will and walk in thy ways for ever.

[And he rises and runs out of the hall with head averted from the vision.]

LADY MARY.

I am cold, cold! If I am indeed of the grave and no more aught in my own dear home, and no more aught to him I worshipped, let the winds take me. Oh, had he died, our bed should have been our grave. One grave, one heaven. I am like a little child, cast out, with none to help me. Where is Herbert, he who loved me so, for if he lives I am not alone in the resurrection of the dead. Herbert, Herbert!

[As she calls her cousin's name, she goes again to the window. A passing cloud obscures the moon and throws its shadow on her. But a man's step is heard outside, and LORD HERBERT enters. Without seeing her, he goes straight towards the darkened bier.]

THE WHITE HORSE

LORD HERBERT.

Who called me from my sleep and the new comfort of dear dreams? I thought it was her voice! Who has put out the lights? Henry! Dame Alice! Oh, be it mine to watch. [*He kneels by the bier.*] Alive or dead, I love her. Would that I were dead and with her on her journey. She would know then how I suffered! [*LADY MARY moves a little way towards him, and the cloud of the moon passes and its light illumines her. She makes a motion as of pity for him.*] Thanks be to Him who knows all human hearts that He saw fit to take her to His bosom.

LADY MARY.

Ah!

LORD HERBERT.

Who was that sighing, sighing? [*He turns and sees her figure against the moon-litten casement.*] Ah, is it Mary, Mary? Then, whether dead or alive, come and bless me!

LADY MARY.

Cousin, cousin, am I living or a spirit? Tell me, tell me!

LORD HERBERT.

[*Rising to his feet and again kneeling before her.*] I pray, I pray that this is her spirit, her blessed

THE WHITE HORSE

spirit which I see. For now my heart seems pure and my soul exalted, and I may sit beside her in Paradise

LADY MARY.

I am cold, very cold !

LORD HERBERT.

Come near and nearer still and bless me !

LADY MARY.

[*Raising her hand.*] Herbert, my cousin !

LORD HERBERT.

[*Passionately.*] If you be of those who have escaped from the flesh ; if you be indeed the immortal part of her I loved, speak to me some strange comfort from the grave—but if you're alive, alive ! oh, God be thanked ! No, no, I cannot thank Him ! Where is Geoffrey, Geoffrey ?

LADY MARY.

[*Laying her hand on his head.*] He saw me and fled from me !

LORD HERBERT.

[*Rising.*] Is it some miracle, or the play of wild delusion, or do I dream, dream ? [*He takes her in his arms.*] No, she is alive, alive. Mary !

THE WHITE HORSE

LADY MARY.

He who loved me saw me, Herbert, and could not see me, though I spoke, for he trembled and crouched upon the floor; and I am cold, afraid, afraid of death and hateful lilies and the religious lights the wind put out. Am I then dead? For he prayed against me and thrust out his palms, so, so, and bade me leave him, and crossed himself and fled crying, crying!

LORD HERBERT.

Beloved, beloved! I have loved you always. If you were dead I should love you! For you I would meet Death upon his pale horse and strive with him. I would leap into your grave and fight corruption and the worm; stand the chill vault and warm you; break you from the coffin; take in these cerements to my heart.

LADY MARY.

I live, I live!

LORD HERBERT.

Mary, let it be that you are—dead! Come with me, dead love, and by the morning you shall be across the hills in my warm keeping. He has lost you, lost you! Let them swear some mighty miracle has snatched you incorruptible to Paradise!

THE WHITE HORSE

LADY MARY.

To—Paradise? Was it yesterday I—died?

LORD HERBERT.

Nay, at midnight of the day before it.

LADY MARY.

In whose arms, Herbert?

LORD HERBERT.

In his, in his! [*He looses her and thrusts her away a little space.*] I—I was not at your bridal, Mary——

LADY MARY.

Bring my lord back to me——

LORD HERBERT.

That day I spent upon the mountains with the devils.
Bring him! have you no mercy?

LADY MARY.

When did love have mercy? Bring him to me.

LORD HERBERT.

[*Sinking on his knees and kissing her hands.*]
Beloved! Can I endure again? [*He rises to his feet and goes to the window.*] Look, Mary, the dawn is coming!

THE WHITE HORSE

LADY MARY.

After the night, this night!

LORD HERBERT.

Before it! It creeps like a pale mist over the snow and makes it colder. The moon is paler!

LADY MARY.

Is there no rose upon the hills, Herbert?

LORD HERBERT.

It's one grey pathless wilderness, without love.

LADY MARY.

Geoffrey, Geoffrey!

LORD HERBERT.

Fear not, Mary. I will send him to you, saying that you yet are of the earth.

LADY MARY.

Will he believe, believe?

LORD HERBERT.

He shall be persuaded. Look now from this casement. If you see me upon my white horse you will know he comes to you!

THE WHITE HORSE

LADY MARY.

The white horse?

[He answers nothing but takes her in his arms and holds her for a little space. Leaving her, he goes out with a firm step and uplifted head.]

LADY MARY.

The pale horse of death! *[She gathers the cloak about her and stands at the casement. Now there comes a pale tinge of rose in the sky. She bends out of the casement and looks down.]* Will Geoffrey never, never come? *[She turns back into the room and picks up the stem of lilies she had held in her crossed hands, and goes again to the window.]* Ah, the white horse, the white horse! *[She throws the stem of lilies out of the casement and, turning, runs towards the entrance at which GEOFFREY enters.]* Ah!

CURTAIN.

THE LAY FIGURE

A TRAGEDY IN
ONE ACT

CHARACTERS

RAYMOND, *a Painter*

LUCY, *his wife*

MIRANDA, *a model*

Scene: Paris

Time: The Present

THE LAY FIGURE

Scene: A Painter's studio, with pictures in various stages of completion. There is a dais with a big oak chair and by it an easel with a canvas on it. Entrance on left at back. A door at R. corner leads to bedroom or small studio. On the right side are a stove and a couch. Coloured draperies everywhere. Down stage on left is an armchair in which is seated a life-size lay figure partially dressed. This figure is in an attitude of deep dejection. The curtain rises on an empty stage.

[Enter Raymond from the corner door.]

RAYMOND.

Come, Miranda, give me one more minute. Ah, what a thing painting is!

[MIRANDA enters dressed in a splendid Spanish costume.]

MIRANDA.

Yours is wonderful, Raymond.

[She mounts the dais, and poses in the chair.]

THE LAY FIGURE

RAYMOND.

Yes, look straight at me. [*He arranges the draperies and retires.*] That's splendid. It's only a touch or two I want.

MIRANDA

I just can't keep still, Raymond. I'm happy—happy and—afraid!

RAYMOND.

[*Painting*] Afraid! Of what?

MIRANDA.

You know.

RAYMOND.

Of——

MIRANDA.

Of her! Your—your wife. She must be strange.

RAYMOND.

Oh, she was mad, I think. Don't speak of her, Miranda. I think my hand shakes. I should have kept my head and my heart till this was done.

THE LAY FIGURE

MIRANDA.

You drew my heart, drew it out of me. The picture! oh! it's splendid. But it can't love you, Raymond. Oh——

RAYMOND.

[*Still painting and in absorption.*] What is it, child?

MIRANDA.

[*Pouting.*] It will be alive when I'm—dead. That makes me feel as if the sun went out.

RAYMOND.

Don't speak of death, Miranda. What we want is life, more, more life. Life's so splendid.

MIRANDA.

If love is in it. [*She springs from the dais and runs to him.*] You do love me, Raymond?

RAYMOND.

[*Passionately.*] By God, I love you.

MIRANDA.

[*Very gravely.*] Yet I'm jealous, jealous. You—you loved her once.

THE LAY FIGURE

RAYMOND.

That's true.

MIRANDA.

Does love die then ?

RAYMOND.

No.

MIRANDA.

Then you still love her.

RAYMOND.

[*Putting down palette and taking her by the shoulders.*] You don't understand, child. One may love the past, and life's a history. I also love the skies and the moon. But you are fire, the fire I love and warm my heart by.

MIRANDA.

I hate the skies and the clouds, though they're so far off, and the cold, cold moon. I'm jealous, Raymond, jealous of the moon.

RAYMOND.

Ah, don't be foolish, dear one.

MIRANDA.

Your wife——

THE LAY FIGURE

RAYMOND.

Don't,

MIRANDA.

[*Catching him round the neck.*] Say you hate her.

RAYMOND.

I can't do that.

MIRANDA.

Then say, "Poor thing." That's so little. What would she say of me?

RAYMOND.

Since I do not love her she's the poorer, it may be!

MIRANDA.

Say "poor thing."

RAYMOND.

Poor thing, indeed!

MIRANDA.

I think she must be like a lay-figure. Like madame there, poor wooden madame.

[*She points at the lay-figure down stage.*]

THE LAY FIGURE

RAYMOND.

Don't speak of her. Are you not content to be young and beautiful?

MIRANDA.

[*Seizing a mirror.*] Pooh, I'm not beautiful. Am I beautiful, Raymond?

RAYMOND.

I found it out yesterday.

MIRANDA.

So you did. I'm not a lay-figure, am I? Are my eyes beautiful?

RAYMOND.

I think them so.

MIRANDA.

[*Breaking from him.*] Is there another woman like me, so good, so bad, so mad, so—so sweet?

RAYMOND.

You're the strangest creature, you elf, you delightful goblin from the moon.

MIRANDA.

Pouf for your cold moon. I'm alive!

THE LAY FIGURE

RAYMOND.

Thank God! But there's life in everything, Miranda. Once when I was alone here with nothing but despair in my heart——

MIRANDA.

[*Laying her hand on his breast.*] Dear heart!

RAYMOND.

And no companion but that; [*pointing to the lay figure*] it seemed to be alive. I thought it mocked me, and then pitied me. Oh, there's a strange devil or a divinity in things, in everything, Miranda. That poor wooden creature seemed to move; even as I have seen the dead and thought they stirred and breathed! Her eyes in the dark seemed to glow and my blood was ice within me.

MIRANDA.

[*Shivering.*] You strange man. You've suffered. I love you for it. I would not have had you suffer less, dear. My heart's yours, yours!

RAYMOND.

Sometimes you've loved others, Miranda!

MIRANDA.

Never, never! Sometimes I've seen dim stars, or a ghost in a woodland. Those are thoughts! If I lost you I should kill myself—or you—or her!

THE LAY FIGURE

RAYMOND.

Her?

MIRANDA.

She who stole into my little paradise and took you from me. [*She pauses and looks at him.*] Once I knew a woman, it was in Madrid, who killed her lover. She used to sing a little wild song about a Spanish girl who carried a knife, and on it was engraved "Your heart's for me, for me!" She died—in prison, Raymond. There are songs that make me mad too, just as love does. There is always love in music. [*She picks up a curved knife in a red sheath from the table.*] Is this a Spanish knife, Raymond?

RAYMOND.

I bought it in Damascus.

MIRANDA.

[*Drawing it from its sheath.*] Has it ever killed anyone, I wonder! That's so strange to think of. Or will it? That's stranger: that's fate, isn't it? Look, Raymond. Some day you shall paint me as a queen who has killed her lover. Oh, no, no, not that: I'll kill my poor self instead, and you shall put yourself in the picture. Will you weep for your queen? Oh, look at me!

[*She springs on the dais, holding the knife.*]

THE LAY FIGURE

RAYMOND.

You are a queen !

MIRANDA.

Do you remember the strange little foolish song you read to me out of that book? [*She drops the knife, springs from the dais, and gets a book and goes back again.*] Here it is! I've read it a hundred times, and fifty times I wept and fifty times I laughed! It's the quaint little song of the thirsty dagger that danced at a man's belt. I—I can understand it, after yesterday.

RAYMOND.

[*Sitting down.*] Read it !

MIRANDA.

“Did I but heed my dagger, now at night time
I should go find thee, love.
Beneath thy vest I would seek so deftly
The spot where beats thy heart—
And pour thy blood's red warmth out for my
dagger,
Because thy kiss, oh love, thou hast denied
me,
While I have thirsted for that kiss,
Even as this dagger thirsts now for thy blood.”

THE LAY FIGURE

RAYMOND.

Did you love me then, then when I read it?

MIRANDA.

I could not have killed 'you then. Or—or myself.
But I loved you.

RAYMOND.

Come down to me!

[She throws down the book and leaps to him.]

MIRANDA.

[At his knees.] Say you love me, and my heart,
and my love for you. Say I am more beautiful than
I am. Women love to be told such sweet lies,
Raymond.

RAYMOND.

[Kissing her hands.] I'll tell no lies. I love you.
You are beautiful as—the night.

MIRANDA.

As the sweet dark when the chill moon is hidden,
Raymond.

RAYMOND.

Or as the dawn!

THE LAY FIGURE

MIRANDA.

When the poor stars die of love for the sun.

RAYMOND.

As love itself, sweet.

MIRANDA.

That's my goed, my good, dear lover. If any one tried to separate us!

RAYMOND.

No one can!

MIRANDA.

She might!

RAYMOND.

She cannot; child! Be wise! Life's so short for love and work. You shall soon stay with me always: we'll always be together.

MIRANDA.

Do you know I'd rather lie dead with you than——

RAYMOND.

Don't talk so. I'm jealous too, jealous even of death. But after this week, child, you shall sit for no one else, no painter living!

THE LAY FIGURE

MIRANDA.

I will not. I promise.

RAYMOND.

That's sweet. Come now, help me to drape our lady here. I'll paint from it this afternoon when you're not with me. Your dress will make it live for me. I'll breathe life into it, Miranda.

MIRANDA.

Then I'll kill it! 'Tis an ugly thing, but it will be with you when I'm away. I'll have this dress off. Kiss me! [*He kisses her, and she goes behind the screen which she opens on the left, while he wheels the figure up in the chair. Peeping out from behind.*] Don't you carry her, the monster. You'll make me jealous. I can't bear to see her in your arms.

RAYMOND.

You silly child.

MIRANDA.

[*Laughing.*] You'll breathe life into it, and go mad and love it, make an idol of it! I shall kill her if she doesn't kill me.

RAYMOND.

[*Laughing.*] You fantastic child!

[*MIRANDA comes out from behind the screen clad in black, holding the Spanish dress, which*

THE LAY FIGURE

she throws on the chair. Then she folds the screen up again while RAYMOND drapes the dress over the lay figure.

MIRANDA.

[*Coming back.*] Pouf, you hateful thing!

RAYMOND.

Pity her, child. She looks as sad as a Sunday in England. That's a terrible country.

MIRANDA.

Now, wooden heart, doesn't this dress cheer you?
[*They arrange the figure together.*]

RAYMOND.

That's better. In the dark she's half alive.

MIRANDA.

[*Making faces at the figure.*] Horrible thing; she's like death. I hate her! But she can't kiss you, Raymond. And I can! [*They kiss, and MIRANDA picks up a big square of silk and throws it over the figure's head.*] She shan't look at my portrait while you're away.

THE LAY FIGURE

RAYMOND.

You're the strangest child !

MIRANDA.

Am I not? It's so sweet not knowing what one is going to do next. You see I am I, but who "I" am is the puzzle.

RAYMOND.

That's what philosophers say. [*Clock strikes two.*] There's two o'clock. Come, we're to have lunch with old Moret to-day. [*Two knocks on the wall to the left.*] There, that's the old boy knocking now. Don't mind his jokes, Miranda.

MIRANDA.

I'm too happy, dearest.

[*They go up stage hand in hand and out of the door, while she sings to herself.* RAYMOND turns round at the door, looks back at the figure, and closes the door. Presently their laughter is heard outside. The light in the studio darkens as the sky fills with clouds. Then there is a light knock at the door. Then a heavier one. The door opens and a tall pale woman clad in black enters. She looks about her.

THE LAY FIGURE

LUCY.

Raymond! [*Again there is laughter off. It sounds sinister in the silence.* LUCY comes down stage swiftly and then goes back to the dais and looks at the veiled figure.] It's like death! [*She turns and sees the portrait of MIRANDA.*] That's she, then! He thinks this girl beautiful, beautiful. Once he thought I was! And now—— [*Again there is laughter off stage. She shivers.* Oh, there's a sinister devil in unshared laughter. [*Turns to the lay figure and snatches away the silken square.*] That's as he's painting her! [*She treads upon the knife and sees the book on the dais. She picks them up.*] He used to love this book; he's faithful to it. And this knife he gave to me! [*She lays them down again. Once more there is laughter off stage.*] They're happy! That's Raymond's voice. Oh, to remember Italy, Italy! Is that *her* laughter! My God, what shall I do? They'll come back. [*She looks round wildly, and then looks at the lay figure and laughs.*] I'll hear them, hear them!

[*It grows darker still. Suddenly she picks up the figure, carries it to the little studio on the right. In a moment she comes back with the dress on. The clouds pass overhead, it grows lighter again. The knife lies at her feet as she sits in the oak chair and poses herself as the figure was posed. She throws the silk over her head as steps are heard outside. The door opens and RAYMOND comes in laughing.*

THE LAY FIGURE

RAYMOND.

Come, Miranda, you'll make me jealous if you linger behind with our good Moret !

MIRANDA.

[*Entering in boisterous spirits.*] You silly man ! Old Moret makes bad jokes, but has good wine, and as to love, she and he said good-bye to each other long ago. He told me he had loved no one but himself for thirty years. What a bore that must be ! And if he worships himself, what a deity ! I'd as soon love a lay figure, one like this, that's old, with creaking joints and a cold, cold heart of wood. [*She bows to the figure on the dais.*] Pouf, you old lay-figure, pouf, you ugly image ! You're dead, and I'm alive, and can love. But you are as dead as Monsieur Moret's heart. Mine dances, dances !

[*She dances about the dais wildly, snapping her fingers like castanets, while RAYMOND laughs.*]

RAYMOND.

Bravo, Miranda, you're splendid ! [*There is a heavy knock on the wall.*] That's our good Moret again. What does he want now ?

[*Seizes MIRANDA round the waist, gives her a twist, and then kisses her.*]

THE LAY FIGURE

MIRANDA.

Oh, you good bad man, let me be. Oh, my hair's down. Go to your old Moret, and I'll run off!

[*Exit RAYMOND laughing.*]

MIRANDA.

I'm happy, happy, happy! Raymond loves me, adores me. I don't want the sun or moon now! I've known what love is, how sweet, how warm, how strong! Oh, it's strong as death, as the grave—they say! I'll not think of that. [*She dances again and sings.*] Tra la la! I love Raymond and he loves me. [*She snaps her fingers at the veiled figure.*] Think of that, old lady, think of that.

[*LUCY's white hand rises from the silk and*

MIRANDA stands as if stricken into stone.

LUCY pulls off the cover slowly and MIRANDA gives a strangled scream.

MIRANDA.

Oh, what's this. Who—who are you?

LUCY.

Cannot you tell, you—you wanton!

MIRANDA.

Oh, you're——

THE LAY FIGURE

LUCY.

His wife, girl!

MIRANDA.

[*Retreating.*] Don't look like that! Oh—God!

LUCY.

[*Rising and stepping from the dais.*] I—I could kill you!

MIRANDA.

It's me he loves, not you, not you!

LUCY.

I am his wife.

MIRANDA.

What of that? You left him. Be merciful now to—him! He loves me, he loves me!

LUCY.

Let me look at you. [*She advances, takes hold of her arm and turns her round.*] You're no more beautiful than I, even now, now!

THE LAY FIGURE

MIRANDA.

[*Wildly.*] He thinks so! But you frighten me!
Let me go! I'll scream and bring him here!

LUCY.

He'll come back—to me. Go, go now and I'll forgive you and—him! I was hard, oh—I was young and youth's so hard. I didn't understand a thousand things that now are easy, easy! Life's hard to learn. Oh, what a bitter thing life is. But he's great. *You* can't comprehend him. It's your—youth, your gaiety. That will pass and you'll be old. And all the time I'm his wife. I'm in his heart. In his secret heart he hides me!

MIRANDA.

That's a lie! He has told me a thousand times since—yesterday, that he loves me. I'll call him and he'll repeat it. I'd give my life for him.

LUCY.

You believe then that he loves you?

MIRANDA.

There's no such truth as that

THE LAY FIGURE

LUCY.

You are sure, utterly sure?

MIRANDA.

[*Clasping her hands.*] As sure as I am of life, here, here, in my heart.

LUCY.

Then let me speak to him—alone! But you dare not!

MIRANDA.

[*Proudly.*] Oh, I dare. He'll never say he loves you, never, never! He said you were a poor thing!

LUCY.

I can take him from you!

MIRANDA.

You cannot!

LUCY.

Go in there! He'll come back. Wait till he sees me, till he speaks. Oh, you dare not!

MIRANDA.

He's mine and loves me! I'm as sure of him as I am [of yesterday, or of to-morrow. As sure

THE LAY FIGURE

as I shall see to-morrow, see the sun again, and hear his voice. Oh, so sure I am of his love. You called me a wanton! That's a lie, a lie! I'm no wanton! There's no man but Raymond ever held me in his arms; no other has ever kissed my lips. And many have asked me, many, many! You think you'll take him from me! You cannot.

LUCY.

I can try!

MIRANDA.

Try then! Oh, it's you who are shameless. You'd have me make him say he loves you no longer, hear him say I taught him what love is. Oh, my love, my love! You'd hear that?

LUCY.

I can endure it.

MIRANDA.

You shall then. Knock at that wall! He's in there with a friend, but at *my* call he'll come! Think, it's *my* call he answers! Think of it!

LUCY.

I have thought. Oh, I have thought too much. I'll knock.

[She knocks thrice upon the wall and comes back to the dais and sits down in the oak chair.]

THE LAY FIGURE

MIRANDA.

[*Mocking.*] Hide your face! Perhaps he'll kiss you then?

LUCY.

You devil!

MIRANDA.

There's time to go! It's I that shall laugh. I'll hide! Here he comes! Oh, hide that white face, madam!

[*She goes out at the right upper entrance and*
LUCY *throws the veil over her head.*

[RAYMOND *comes in at the left entrance.*

RAYMOND.

Miranda, Miranda, where are you? Why, she's gone. She knocked just to say so. There's no creature like her. She's sun and flame; oh, she's a scarlet lizard in the sun of Italy! She's grapes upon a vine; she's bright running water. There's a woman for you! Ah! [*He bends his head a moment as if thinking and sighs again.*] Ah, the old days, the old, old days! They've gone. I'll do some work, and splash in that drapery. [*Picks up his palette, whistling. Walks towards the figure, stops, turns round, throws more light upon it from above by the blinds. Goes to figure again, lays hold of the silk and, as he turns back again, pulls it off.* LUCY *sits there white as death.* RAYMOND *fills a brush and then looks round.*] Great God in heaven! I'm dreaming! It's a vision, a dream! Oh, perhaps she's dead! Lucy, wife!

THE LAY FIGURE

LUCY.

Your wife, Raymond!

RAYMOND.

You've come—back!

LUCY.

I've come back, my—husband!

RAYMOND.

Why didn't you come back yesterday: ah, even yesterday had not been too late.

LUCY.

[*In agitation.*] Too late! Is it too late! Don't say so. Raymond! I'm changed, changed——

RAYMOND.

It's too late, much, much too late. You don't understand——

LUCY.

There's another woman then——

RAYMOND.

[*Wildly.*] You left me for some light folly of mine, a boyish folly. I adored you. You knew it, and because I kissed a poor little fool who begged a

THE LAY FIGURE

kiss one day, you left my house. I've been alone since, all alone!

LUCY.

Till—yesterday!

RAYMOND.

Till yesterday!

LUCY.

[*Stooping and picking up the knife.*] She's some poor wanton, Raymond, some creature of the shadows. Give her, give her—money!

RAYMOND.

My God! [MIRANDA stands in the doorway, clutching the door posts. LUCY sees her and sees her not.] Oh, she'll not take—money! She's no wanton, Lucy.

LUCY.

But I'm your wife. [*She steps down from the dais.*] You love me now!

RAYMOND.

No, no! I cannot!

LUCY.

You love me, love me. [*She drops the knife.*]

THE LAY FIGURE

RAYMOND.

What's that?

LUCY.

I meant to kill myself or—or someone else. Oh, say you love me!

RAYMOND.

No, Miranda adores me. She has given me everything. There's no such creature for joy alive! I cannot kill her.

LUCY.

Kill her? Oh, I'm your wife! And—there is something else——

RAYMOND.

What else?

LUCY.

Cannot you guess, Raymond?

RAYMOND.

I will not.

LUCY.

Our—our child!

[MIRANDA leans forward. LUCY wavers and falls into RAYMOND'S arms. He lays her down upon the dais.

THE LAY FIGURE

RAYMOND.

She's dead. She's dead!

[He runs out, the door closes : he is heard calling "MORET, MORET!" and gets no answer. His voice dies away in the distance. MIRANDA creeps in and lays hold of the knife as LUCY stirs. She runs to the door and locks it. She moves swiftly to LUCY, with the knife uplifted.]

MIRANDA.

Ah ! I—cannot !

[Her uplifted arm falls. LUCY opens her eyes and sees her.]

LUCY.

[Wildly.] Where's my husband !

MIRANDA.

Gone, gone !

LUCY.

Gone ! He loves me still.

MIRANDA.

He said "No," and he did not know I was there !

[She points to the door.]

THE LAY FIGURE

LUCY.

[*Rising.*] I tell you he loves me. There's our child.

MIRANDA.

[*With her hand at her bosom.*] I, too, might have one!

LUCY.

Give me that knife. [*She seizes MIRANDA'S wrist and tries to wrench it from her. RAYMOND comes to the door, and finds it locked. He shakes it violently and beats on it.*]

RAYMOND.

Let me in, Lucy, let me in!

MIRANDA.

Raymond, dearest Raymond!

[*LUCY gets the knife and stabs her.*]

LUCY.

You wanton!

MIRANDA.

[*Staggering.*] Raymond, help, help!

[*The door is burst open and RAYMOND enters and runs towards them. LUCY drops the knife and falls upon the couch. MIRANDA, near the dais, rises to her knees by help of chairs. RAYMOND lifts her.*]

THE LAY FIGURE

MIRANDA.

In that chair, Raymond.

RAYMOND.

You are ill ! My God !

MIRANDA.

I'm dying !

RAYMOND.

What's this ? Blood, it's blood ! My God, Lucy !
[*LUCY rises on the couch and spreads out her hands and says not a word. RAYMOND picks up the knife and drops it.*] You cried, "Help," Miranda ? Did she stab you ?

LUCY.

[*Wildly, rising.*] It's a lie !

RAYMOND.

Miranda !

MIRANDA.

[*Feebly*] Kiss me, Raymond, You loved her best.

THE LAY FIGURE

RAYMOND.

I did not. Oh, she's damned!

LUCY.

Ah!

MIRANDA.

[*Leaning on him.*] I was happy one little day, Raymond, one little day! That's so much! [*Puts her hand to her heart.*] I—I——

RAYMOND.

What, my darling?

MIRANDA.

I killed—myself, Raymond. She's your—wife. I wanted to kill her, but—but I could not!

LUCY.

It's all a lie, a lie. I killed her, Raymond. I stabbed her with this, this——

[*She picks the knife up.*]

RAYMOND.

Give it me!

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LUCY.

I will not.

RAYMOND.

I'll have it. [*Wrenches it from her.*] You devil, you devil! Miranda!

MIRANDA.

Hold me, Raymond! I'm dying. It's all so dark, so dark.

LUCY.

I never meant it, never.

MIRANDA.

I'm all alone!

RAYMOND.

I'm with you, child. Oh, and shall be!

MIRANDA.

Raymond, kiss me. [*He kisses her.*]

RAYMOND.

It's not good-bye, child. I am coming with you!

[*LUCY screams and runs to him. He throws her off violently and stabs himself. As he does so, MIRANDA holds up one hand to him and slides out of the chair. He draws out*

THE LAY FIGURE

the knife and sinks down with her. The knife falls. He puts his arms about MIRANDA and lays his head upon her bosom. LUCY hides her face, goes towards them, and then moves down the stage backward and falls into the chair that the lay-figure sat in, and sits in the same attitude.

CURTAIN.

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